



# Wisconsin Elections Commission

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**TO:** All Wisconsin Election Officials

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**SUBJECT:** **Absentee Ballot Drop Box Information**

This document is intended to provide information and guidance on drop box options for secure absentee ballot return for voters. The information has been adapted from a resource developed as part of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. The original document can be found here:  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a665c98017db2b60bc22084/t/5e8f42d717ee5e7ee2db8c8b/1586447064805/Ballot\\_Drop-Box\\_final.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a665c98017db2b60bc22084/t/5e8f42d717ee5e7ee2db8c8b/1586447064805/Ballot_Drop-Box_final.pdf).

## What is an Absentee Ballot Drop Box?

A ballot drop box provides a secure and convenient means for voters to return their by mail absentee ballot. A drop box is a secure, locked structure operated by local election officials. Voters may deposit their ballot in a drop box at any time after they receive it in the mail up to the time of the last ballot collection Election Day. Ballot drop boxes can be staffed or unstaffed, temporary or permanent.

Some voters prefer to deliver their by mail absentee ballots to a drop box rather than sending them back through the mail. These voters may be motivated by lack of trust in the postal process, fear that their ballot could be tampered with, or concern that their information will be exposed. Voters may also be concerned about ensuring that their ballot is returned in time to be counted.

Ballot drop boxes and drop-off locations allow voters to deliver their ballots in person. More importantly, the availability of ballot drop boxes and drop-off locations ensures that even voters who wait until the last minute to return their ballot or who receive their requested ballot in the mail too late to return it via USPS will have timely options to return their ballots.

## Repurposing Options

In a COVID-19 environment, creative solutions may be required. Your municipality may already have infrastructure set up for secure collection of payment and materials. Consider repurposing the following options as secure ballot drops:

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- Designate drop boxes or mail slots set up for taxes, mail and public utilities as secure ballot drop locations.
- Partnering with public libraries to use book and media drop slots for ballot collection.
- Partnering with businesses or locations that have already implemented social distancing practices, such as grocery stores and banks.



Many of these locations are already secure and located in places familiar to city residents. If you choose to do something similar, be sure to inquire about the security of these drops and identify how you can access ballots returned through these options. These locations should be marked with signage that clearly identifies the location as a ballot drop box and lists the final time ballots will be collected on election day. After the final election day pickup, clear signage should be placed at each drop site marking the location as “closed for ballot drop” and information regarding additional ballot return options and deadlines should be listed on these signs.

## Types of Drop Boxes

### Outdoor Options

#### 1. Staffed, Temporary Drive-Through Drop Off

A drive-through drop-off location is an easy way to keep traffic flowing when demand for a ballot drop box is at its peak, especially on Election Day. This drive-through is typically set up in a parking lot or a street depending on the location.

The team staffing the site accepts ballots from voters as they pull through, depositing them directly into a ballot box. For voters who prefer placing the ballot directly into the box themselves, the portable ballot box is brought to the car window. In addition to the supplies listed below, you will need a team of at least two to three to support the drop-off site.

- Pop-up tent
- Table
- Chairs
- Ballot box
- Road signs
- Orange cones
- Flashlights
- High-visibility vests for workers
- Weather appropriate support— propane heater, rain gear, lanterns
- Personal protective equipment such as gloves, masks, and hand sanitizer as appropriate and in accordance with current CDC guidance



## 2. Unstaffed, 24-Hour Ballot Drop Box

In high-demand areas, installing a permanent ballot drop box—one that can be accessed by voters 24/7—is a good solution. These boxes should be constructed of durable material such as steel and be permanently cemented into the ground. This type of ballot drop box may cost as much as \$6,000 each. Other options such as courier boxes are available from industrial supply companies and may be more affordable. In addition to purchasing the 24-hour box you will need:

- Video surveillance camera (or place the drop box in an area already covered by a security camera)
- Media storage device (for recorded video)
- Municipal decal or Election signage
- Extra keys for opening slot and access door
- Security seals



## Indoor Option

### Staffed or Unstaffed – Indoor Temporary Ballot Drop Box

When demand for a ballot drop box is low, a temporary ballot box located in a place such as the municipal clerk's office is a good solution. These boxes should be constructed of durable material and include a key or combination lock as well as a way to securely fasten the box to prevent it from being moved or tampered with. This type of box looks similar to the example pictured here. Staffed drop boxes can also be used at polling places on election day to collect absentee ballots from voters without having those voters wait in line in the voting area.

In addition to purchasing or renting the ballot box, you will need:

- Padlock and keys (if not included)
- Bike chain or some other way to fasten the box to prevent it from being removed (if not staffed)
- Security seals



## Security

Ballot drop boxes must be secured and locked at all times. Only an election official or a designated ballot drop box collection team should have access to the keys and/or combination of the lock. In addition to locks, all drop boxes should be sealed with one or more tamper evident seals.

Ideally, unstaffed 24-hour drop boxes should be located in areas with good lighting and be monitored by video surveillance cameras. When this is not feasible, positioning the box close to a nearby camera is a good option. Also consider placing it in a high traffic area and inviting local law enforcement to make regular observations.

Try to place indoor drop boxes in locations where they can be monitored by a person in real time. When ballot boxes are unstaffed and not being monitored, the box should be securely fastened to a stationary surface or immovable object, such as a counter or wall, in a way that prevents moving or tampering.

## Chain of Custody

- Chain of custody logs must be completed every time ballots are collected.
- All ballot collection boxes/bags should be numbered to ensure all boxes are returned at the end of the shift, day, and on election night.
- Team members should sign the log and record the date and time, security seal number at opening, and security seal number when the box is locked and sealed again.

## Location

Ballot drop boxes should be placed in convenient, accessible locations, including places close to public transportation routes, near or on college campuses, and public buildings, such as libraries and community centers familiar to voters and easy to find. If there is time, getting input from citizens and community groups is recommended.

All drop box locations should be evaluated for:

- Security
- Lighting (well-lit 24 hours a day)
- High visibility
- Security cameras
- Accessibility
- Voter convenience
- Parking or drive-through options

## How Many Drop Boxes Do You Need?

At a minimum, you should have a drop box at your primary municipal building, such as the village hall. Voters generally know the locations of these buildings and are already accustomed to voting or doing business there. Some other best practices include:

- Have one drop box for every 15,000–20,000 registered voters.
- Consider adding more drop boxes to areas where there may be communities with historically low absentee ballot return rates.
- Use demographic data and analysis to determine whether there should be a different formula for rural and urban locations (i.e., 1 for every 15,000 residents may be every mile in an urban area, but every 50 miles in a rural area).